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STATEMENT OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Before the Subcommittee on Parks, Recreation,
and Renewable Resources
of the
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate

On S. 812 and S. 1369. Bills to designate certain National Forest System lands in the State of Oregon for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

September 27, 1979

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to review with you the Administration's wilderness recommendations for the National Forests in the State of Oregon. These recommendations are contained in S. 1369. In addition, I will comment on the specific areas of concern which you have asked us to address.

On April 16, of this year, the White House released the President's statement setting forth his recommendation that Congress designate 15.4 million acres of National Forest wilderness identified during the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation. At the same time, he announced his decision that the 10.6 million acres shall undergo further planning as individual National Forest land management plans are prepared between now and 1985, and that 36 million acres shall be managed for multiple uses other

than wilderness. On May 2, the President's statement and additional background information were transmitted to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate with a recommendation that Congress designate the proposed wildernesses.

The Administration's wilderness recommendations for Oregon include 16 new wildernesses encompassing 303,930 acres and additions to six existing wilderness areas involving 111,930 acres. This would increase the number of National Forest System wildernesses in Oregon from the existing 13 to 29, and add 415,860 acres of wilderness, resulting in a total National Forest System wilderness of 1,628,735 acres. This represents 10.4% of National Forest System lands in the State.

The Department of the Interior administers two wildernesses in Oregon, the Oregon Islands and Three Arch Rocks. These small islands, totaling 367 acres, are located on wildlife refuges along the Oregon coast. The Wild Rouge Wilderness on the Siskiyou National Forest includes 10,160 acres of land administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The Administration has endorsed a 127,058-acre wilderness at Crater Lake National Park and two Fish and Wildlife Service wilderness proposals totaling 46,500 acres.

S. 1369 would designate 15 new wildernesses and 6 wilderness additions. These areas are identical to those recommended by the Administration, except for a 530-acre portion of the proposed Red Butte Wilderness. The majority of this area (25,300 acres) is in the State of California.

S. 812 would designate all, or portions, of five of the Administration's recommended wilderness additions (59,057 acres), but does not include any of the new wilderness areas recommended by the Administration. This

bill includes all of the Administration's proposed additions to Mt. Washington, Diamond Peak, Three Sisters, and Gearhart Mountain. It would designate only 13,000 acres of the 35,100 acres proposed as additions to the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness. It excludes the 31,300-acre addition to Eagle Cap recommended by the Administration.

The National Wilderness Preservation System in Oregon would be enhanced in quality and diversity by including all of the areas recommended by the Administration. The nonwilderness areas can provide additional timber and recreation opportunities because some of these areas were previously being considered for possible wilderness designation, and therefore have not been available for timber management or recreation development in recent years.

In summary, Secretary Bergland and I firmly believe the adoption of these well-balanced wilderness recommendations will provide for continuation of primitive, dispersed recreation opportunities, with a minimum effect on harvest levels and dollar returns, and negligible adverse economic impacts on communities.

We have provided the Committee staff and affected members with narrative information, detailed resource information, and maps for each of our wilderness recommendations. I will not attempt to review each wilderness proposal, nor describe the characteristics of individual areas, unless there are specific questions.

The Committee has requested that I discuss several specific roadless areas. I will report on the rationale for allocation of these specific areas and provide the resource trade-off information that the Committee has requested.

Windigo Thielsen - (RARE II area number 6132): This area was allocated to further planning in the RARE II final environmental statement. The Administration's final proposal recommended wilderness for approximately 55,000 acres, with the balance remaining in further planning. This recommendation reduced the amount of further planning in an area with a high wilderness attribute rating (WARS) and low resource conflict. The Administration's proposal resolves the following resource questions and concerns.

The Windigo Thielsen area is immediately adjacent to Diamond Lake which attracts more than 800,000 visitors per year. The proposed boundary provides for the day-use type visitor in the area immediately adjacent to the Lake. At the same time it provides for the visitor who wants to "get away from the crowds" by a significant allocation of area to wilderness.

Snowmobile and cross-country ski use has been popular and well established prior to RARE II. Conflicts have developed between these uses. The Administration's proposal helps resolve this conflict by assigning snowmobile use to the further planning area in the northwest portion of the roadless area, while the wilderness area would be available for cross-country skiing and other nonmotorized uses.

The proposal maintains the option for timber harvest by leaving the more productive areas outside the wilderness while still providing a highly desirable and manageable wilderness acreage. Likewise, the future option of providing increased fishing access to the Little Deschutes River is maintained. Such road access is particularly important to the elderly and handicapped.

The recommended boundary also accommodates the proposed Cascade Lakes highway system and provides an option for a Bonneville Power Administration power corridor outside of the proposed wilderness in the Windigo Pass area.

There is presently a mountain pine beetle epidemic attacking the lodgepole pine in the vicinity of Diamond Lake. The Administration's proposal could allow necessary control and salvage activities to occur because most of the commercial lodgepole pine stands are outside our proposed wilderness area.

Cowhorn - 6109: The primary reason Cowhorn was allocated to nonwilderness is the public input. This area received the highest total input of any area, with over 87% of the individuals favoring nonwilderness. This is one of the few areas in the Cascade Crest where there is an opportunity for a variety of motorized dispersed recreation activities. The three Forests involved completed land management plans in 1979 which emphasized dispersed motorized recreation. Resource trade-offs primarily involve what types of recreation use will be emphasized.

Much of the 24,000 acres of commercial forest land in this non-wilderness area is mature and over-mature lodgepole pine and mountain hemlock. Some of these stands are deteriorating due to old age, insects and disease. There will be a need to manage the resulting fuels. This may be accomplished by salvage without detracting from the recreation experience.

Sky Lakes - 6143: This is the largest (113,000 acres) new wilderness recommended in Oregon. The area has a relatively high (22) wilderness attributes rating (WARS), ranking among the top 30% in the Pacific Northwest

Region. The wilderness recommendation was based in part upon the high quality recreation and wildlife values in the area. Resource conflicts are minimal because existing management direction precludes development from much of the area.

Our analysis explored the possibility of excluding the south half of Sky Lakes from wilderness designation. While there was some public support for this proposal, we conclude that resource trade-offs are minimal. We believe that this is an excellent opportunity to add a high quality area to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The Committee asked that we comment on the timber salvage opportunities in Sky Lakes. Most of the salvage opportunities are quite low and limited to the Shasta Red Fir plant association. The low per-acre volumes and values do not justify removal.

Eagle Cap - 6279: The proposed western boundary eliminates some of the nonconforming uses which are of concern to the Committee. Existing uses of private lands within the wilderness would continue. This includes two commercial resorts and a private lodge. Access to private land is presently by aircraft, foot or horseback. The two lodges maintain individual aircraft landing strips on their lands. One has a special-use permit for a runway approach on National Forest land where trees are cut and a clearing maintained. The other lodge uses a portion of an adjacent National Forest meadow for part of a landing strip.

A small sawmill extends onto National Forest land and is currently covered by a special-use permit. It is possible that the mill could be relocated so that it lies entirely on private land.

We do not believe these uses seriously detract from the overall quality of the wilderness proposal.

North Fork John Day - 6253: This is an area with considerable interest and controversy. There are significant resource values in this area. They include a high-quality salmon and steelhead spawning area, a programmed harvest of 19.1 million board feet; producing and high potential deposits of gold, silver, chromite and molybdenum; and a river trail that is popular with trailbike recreationists.

The Committee asked why the core area was changed from nonwilderness to further planning. The core area includes the North Fork John Day canyon proper and portions of tributary streams. The further planning designation allows for possible wilderness designation of an area of outstanding diversity, key wildlife habitat and high wilderness values, without resulting in significant commodity conflicts.

The salmon and steelhead fisheries in the area are valued at approximately $570,000 by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The value of native trout habitat is estimated at approximately $16,000 for a total of $586,000.

The area is highly rated for gold and silver deposits, and has a historical background of mining. There are approximately 20 occupancies of buildings and many active and nonactive mining sites throughout the area.

Strawberry Mountain Wilderness Additions - A6238: The shape of the existing Strawberry Mountain Wilderness makes management of the area extremely difficult. The long, narrow shape and the favorable topography

tends to encourage intrusion by off-road vehicles. RARE II identified possible wilderness additions which could improve the quality and quantity of the wilderness experience available in a portion of the State where this is the only existing wilderness.

The Administration's 35,100 acre wilderness addition does include several chromite claims in the area north of the existing wilderness. All these claims are filed by one individual. A mineral study completed by U.S.G.S. in 1977 indicates that the chromite occurrences are marginal. They could possibly become operational if the Government began purchasing chromite ore.

The proposed addition south of the existing wilderness contains some productive timber areas. In the Wall Creek area there are 2,907 acres of commercial forest land containing 28 million board feet of sawtimber. The annual potential yield is 200,000 board feet and the annual programmed harvest is 100,000 board feet. However, the added wilderness acreage is significant in reducing the management problems associated with a long, narrow wilderness.

Red Butte - 6703: The Red Butte Wilderness proposal is located in Oregon and California. Approximately 530 acres are in Oregon and 25,300 acres in California. The 530-acre portion in Oregon is not particularly significant, but results from attempting to define locatable and manageable boundaries. We recommend that the portion in Oregon be considered with the California portion.

Bull of the Woods - A6098: The western boundary of the proposed wilderness is identical to the one considered in the Oregon Omnibus

Wilderness Act of 1977 (S. 658). The proposed wilderness includes the areas of highest quality and greatest concern. The boundary is an easily identifiable ridgetop location.

Limpy Rock - 6125: The area was included in the Administration's proposal because of the presence of several unique plant species which are of high botanical interest, as well as archaeological resources. A 1,900-acre portion of the wilderness proposal has been established as the Limpy Rock Research Natural Area. We recommend wilderness designation because of the botanical values in this area. There are few other wildernesses in this particular area and it would provide an opportunity for wilderness experience in the Roseburg area.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that we believe we have set forth throughly considered and well-balanced recommendations. The President's RARE II decision would not only enlarge the Nation's treasury of wilderness resources, but by releasing some of the land for uses other than wilderness, it responds to the Nation's urgent need for energy, wood products, livestock forage, minerals, and a broad array of recreational opportunities.

This concludes my statement. I would be happy to respond to your questions.

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